



September 20, 2022

The Honorable Raul M. Grijalva
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Chairman
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
1527 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cliff Bentz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
1527 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, Chair Huffman and Ranking Member Bentz,

As organizations representing the nation's saltwater recreational fishing and boating community, we have appreciated the opportunity to engage in the development and consideration of legislation to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). As the House Natural Resources Committee prepares to mark up H.R. 4690, the Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act of 2021, we are writing to restate our appreciation for the multi-year process that Chair Huffman has led in the development of this bill and to remind the committee of the comments and concerns we raised in our letter dated November 16, 2021 (enclosed).

Saltwater recreational fishing is an integral part of America's economy and culture. The nation's 9 million saltwater anglers have \$73.8 billion sales impacts supporting 487,000 U.S. jobs. These benefits are not only felt by coastal communities, but the entire nation, from inland residents who fish during coastal vacations to manufacturing jobs that produce saltwater fishing gear. Regardless of where they reside, saltwater anglers share a common conservation ethic, wanting to ensure our fisheries are healthy and sustainable for current and future generations to experience.

While MSA has unquestionably helped improve the health of marine fisheries, our community continues to face challenges in accessing these resources. We remain concerned by a lack of quality federal recreational fisheries data to adequately meet the Act's strict management requirements. We believe marine recreational fisheries management must be improved by addressing both root causes, i.e., improving federal recreational fisheries data while adapting management requirements based on the data we have.

We recognize and appreciate that the amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 4690 has attempted to address some, but not all, of the concerns we raised in our November 16, 2021, letter. However, we wish to continue to work with you to build upon this legislation and more holistically address the management and conservation priorities of the recreational fishing community. We stand ready to work with you and members of the Committee as the MSA reauthorization discussion continues.

Sincerely,

Glenn Hughes, President
American Sportfishing Association

Chris Edmonston, VP Government Affairs
BoatU.S.

Jeff Angers, President
Center for Sportfishing Policy

Patrick Murray, President
Coastal Conservation Association

Jeff Crane, President
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

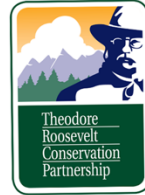
Dr. Guy Harvey, Ph.D., Chairman Emeritus
Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation

Jason Schratwieser, President
International Game Fish Association

Frank Hugelmeyer, President
National Marine Manufacturers Association

Rob Nixon, Executive Director
Recreational Fishing Alliance

Whit Fosburgh, President and CEO
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership



November 16, 2021

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Chairman
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and
Wildlife
1527 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cliff Bentz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and
Wildlife
1527 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Recreational Fishing Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Priorities and Concerns

Dear Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member Bentz,

Thank you for your commitments to developing thoughtful and comprehensive updates to the Magnuson-Stevens Act. We appreciate your inclusion of various stakeholders, such as the marine recreational fishing and boating industry, in drafting H.R. 4690. The undersigned organizations, representing saltwater anglers, boaters and marine-related businesses throughout the United States, write to express several policies that would advance recreational fishing, grow the economy, and invest in marine conservation. We also refresh certain comments on the pending legislation.

Modern Fish Act (Public Law No: 115-405)

Congress overwhelmingly enacted the Modern Fish Act in 2018, which already has provided strong benefits for marine recreational fishing and boating, and fishery conservation. Congress has also appropriated tens of millions of dollars to NOAA Fisheries above baseline levels to improve recreational fishery data collection and enhance partnerships with state fishery managers. Both the Modern Fish Act and the associated funding are extremely important to the millions of Americans who enjoy marine fishing and boating. Americans need greater access to fish in our public waters and greater certainty of fishing seasons. Congress has helped move the needle on both of those counts.

Today, NOAA Fisheries is investing additional staff time and resources toward improving data coordination and alternative management options, but more can and must be done.

We believe that further progress could be made, and more quickly, with specific focus by NOAA Fisheries on timely, periodic allocation reviews and a willingness to make adjustments in mixed-use fisheries; direct support for and implementation of alternative management measures for certain fish stocks, and facilitating greater incorporation of state data into broader management. We urge additional bill language directing action on both allocation review and alternative management measures:

- On allocation: *The Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Councils shall perform an initial review within two years of the date of enactment of this Act of the allocations of all mixed-use fisheries in the Councils respective jurisdictions and a periodic review every three years thereafter; and the Councils shall consider the conservation and socioeconomic benefits of each sector in any allocation decisions.*
- On alternative management: *Within two years after date of enactment of this act, each of the eight Regional Fishery Management Councils shall initiate at least one pilot project to test an alternative management strategy as provided in section 201(b) of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2018 (16 U.S.C. 1881 note) on at least one recreational fishery within each region's jurisdiction.*

Millions more Americans fish and fish more often in more of our ocean spaces than they could when the Magnuson-Stevens Act was written 45 years ago. Saltwater recreational fishing is a major driver of the nation's outdoor economy through everything from retail sales to licensing fees. In fact, the recreational saltwater fishing industry contributes nearly \$74 billion annually to the U.S. economy in sales impacts. Yet, antiquated federal policies threaten to stem this positive economic trend. While there has been some forward progress in implementing the Modern Fish Act, there is still a long way to go. Restrictions on public access to our public marine fisheries continue to flow from a system that no longer reflects the reality of demand for recreational access, the current economic activity associated with that access, or the scientific reality of the light footprint recreational access has on most of our fishery resources.

We urge you not to miss the opportunity in the next Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization to balance the priorities of marine conservation and the economic impacts of the recreational and commercial fishing sectors.

Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act (H.R. 4690)

Sec. 102. Promoting climate resilience in fisheries management – We want to ensure there is general confidence from the Regional Fishery Management Councils and their Science and Statistical Committees about having the capacity to evaluate the impacts of climate change on fish distribution and habitat, and that they will be able to sufficiently incorporate the impacts. Many parts of the country, especially in the southeast, lack baseline data and stock assessments for most of their fisheries. While laudable in its intent, adding new requirements to understand and account for climate change could create additional layers of uncertainty on an already

uncertain management system. We would like to hear more input from the fisheries management community to better understand the implications of this section, particularly where such data is limited.

Sec. 105. Managing shifting stocks – Shifting stocks create jurisdictional challenges for fisheries management bodies; however, we are concerned with new procedures set forth in this section to address the challenge of shifting stocks. First, we are concerned about the broad discretion given to the Secretary to make determinations of cross-jurisdictional fisheries. Terms such as “substantial portion” are vague. Absent clearly defined criteria for such determinations, we are concerned that political or other non-scientific factors may be allowed to influence potential decisions by the Secretary that shift fish stock management across jurisdictions, resulting in significant impacts on fishing communities.

Sec. 106. Emerging fisheries – Given increasing demands on our marine resources and growing concerns about potential ecosystem impacts, we support further consideration of appropriate steps to conserve emerging fisheries while being careful to avoid disruption to many current recreational fisheries.

Sec. 201. Fishery resource disaster relief – The recreational fishing and boating industries include thousands of small businesses, some of which have been harmed by fishery disasters, yet these economic impacts have not been adequately considered and therefore our businesses often do not receive sufficient relief funding. We strongly support language that will improve the efficiency of disaster relief designations and ensure inclusion of impacts to the recreation sector.

Sec. 304. Council accountability and membership – The recreational fishing community is underrepresented on most of the Regional Fishery Management Councils, and we support efforts to address this inequity. However, this section changes current statute to potentially give undue weight to other categories such as the conservation community and non-consumptive users. Since these groups currently are eligible to, and do, serve on Councils, it is unclear why such statutory changes are needed.

Sec. 406. Recreational data consistency – While we fully support improvements in recreational data collection, it is clear that the language in this section was not developed in consultation with the recreational fishing community. We recognize there is a need to ensure consistency among data sources, but MRIP should not be the basis for that consistency when other non-federal data sources are demonstrated to provide greater precision and accuracy. (Given the opportunity, several Gulf states have recently devised timely recreational data systems that provide a far more accurate standard of data than MRIP and could serve as the model for evolving to a more consistent recreational data currency going forward.) While there are some components of this section that we support, such as including the long-ignored recreational fishing socioeconomic data in the research needs, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss the intent of this section and how it could be improved.

Sec. 504. Improving Rebuilding Outcomes – We have concerns that the changes to rebuilding timeframes could impose drastic changes to recreational fishing without a direct correlation to

resulting conservation. We commit to working with the Committee on adjustments to this section.

Sec. 508. Forage Fish Conservation – We strongly support this section and are grateful for its inclusion. Healthy forage fish populations support the recreational fisheries that we depend upon, and this language will help ensure better management and conservation of these stocks within the MSA framework.

We appreciate the opportunity to review our priorities and the language of this bill.

Sincerely,

Glenn Hughes, President
American Sportfishing Association

Chris Edmonston, VP Government Affairs
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